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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000870

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SUBJECT: HAITIANS MARK 18TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONSTITUTION
WITH VIOLENCE

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: Two separate violent incidents took place in Port-au-Prince on 29 March, the 18th anniversary of the ratification of the Constitution of 1987. Ex-military gang leader Jean Rene Anthony (aka Grenn Sonnen) renewed his call for a guerrilla campaign against Haitian officials and MINUSTAH. Grenn Sonnen's gang is believed to be responsible for the ambush of the Port director's security detail in Delmas 33 on 27 March. The tense situation there escalated yesterday as shooting and pandemonium spread throughout the Delmas area. Simultaneously, a pro-Lavalas demonstration organized by Father Gerard Jean-Juste threw rocks at and reportedly exchanged gunfire with UN peacekeepers in the Bel Aire area of downtown Port-au-Prince. In the aftermath of this demonstration, which numbered at least a thousand, General Heleno publicly condemned Lavalas elements whom he accused of fomenting instability and opposing the electoral process. The Embassy closed an hour early to allow mission personnel to clear the downtown area, which was not directly affected by the violence. End summary.

12. (C) The morning of the 29th, HNP and MINUSTAH increased their presence in Delmas 33 to try to round up Grenn Sonnen's gang. Despite this, around 1230 there was a large volume of random automatic gunfire throughout much of the Delmas area, causing car accidents, gridlock and panicked crowds. The nearby Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) headquarters reported a grenade exploding and automatic weapons being fired at the building at approximately 1300. MINUSTAH is now providing 24-hour protection to the CEP and is conducting foot patrols in the area.

13. (C) In an interview with Radio Solidarite, Grenn Sonnen denied his involvement in the ambush which killed three people, including one police officer, in Delmas 33 late on the 27th. He declared that the Haitian National Police will not be free to move about the country as long as the ex-military is not free to do the same. Grenn Sonnen vowed to kill both HNP and MINUSTAH personnel. He renewed his call for an ex-military guerrilla movement against the Haitian government, saying that Prime Minister Latortue will either have to kill all of the ex-military or else leave the country. He also threatened to kill Youri Latortue and claims to have captured many weapons, including M-16's and M-60 machine guns, from MINUSTAH. In a separate announcement on the morning of the 30th, he declared that he would attack the Police Commissariat on Champ de Mars in downtown Port-au-Prince.

14. (C) The Bel Aire march got off to a confusing start in the mid-morning hours when UN peacekeepers informed the protesters that their march was illegal as they had failed to register it with the HNP. A separate march proposed in Cite Soleil never developed. Organizers billed the march through Bel Aire as a "Peaceful March to Support the Constitution", and Jean-Juste invoked the Constitution in calling for the return of Aristide and for the release of all political prisoners. UN peacekeepers were on hand to provide security and control the route of the march. The march, estimated at between one and five thousand people, began around noon and moved toward the "Place de la Constitution" near the National Palace, but MINUSTAH blocked the roadway and forced protesters back into the Bel Aire neighborhood. The marchers became angry and began throwing stones at UN peacekeepers on the edge of Bel Aire. The UN responded with tear gas. Some gunshots apparently emanated from the crowd, but no casualties were reported. The demonstration was wrapped up by 1300.

15. (C) General Heleno was present and directed UN forces at the demonstration. In the aftermath, he declared that he has been deceived by Lavalas, and he now believes that some Lavalas leaders are determined to use violence to prevent successful elections. He also indicated that MINUSTAH will respond aggressively.

16. (U) RSO monitored the events of the day closely, placing

the affected areas off limits, and the Ambassador sent employees home at 1415 to allow them to clear the downtown area safely. Mission curfew was reduced temporarily to 1900.

17. (C) Comment: Acting SRSG Medili told Ambassador late yesterday that MINUSTAH was aware of the hugely negative psychological impact of the attack on the CEP - the second in a week - and the overall violence. He indicated that MINUSTAH was planning security operations in the next days to reverse the situation. (Note: we are aware of planned operations in Bel Aire and Cite Soleil, as well as ongoing efforts in the Delmas area in pursuit of Grenn Sonnen.) End comment.

FOLEY